

AN INTERVIEW WITH AN ELT EXPERT PROFESSOR
DR. DILIP BARAD ON
ROLE OF ICT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING
Interviewers- Dr. Arvind Nawale & Mr. Prasant Mothe



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Prof. (Dr.) Dilip P. Barad is Professor and Head of the Department of English at Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University, Bhavnagar, Gujarat (India). He has more than 15 years' experience of teaching English to students belonging to various faculties like commerce, management, computers, humanities and social sciences. His areas of interest are CALL, innovative use of ICT in teaching English, Literature(s) and Literary Theories. He has conducted workshops on use of Web tools for teaching in national and international conferences. He has penned books and articles on Thomas Hardy, Kamala Das and Modern Communication, and published articles on Web tools for English teaching. Recently Ministry of HRD (Govt. of India) has awarded special financial assistance for e-Content development and he is working on UGC research project on 'Technology and Teaching English'. He has recently completed online course (Web Skills for Teachers) from University of Oregon, USA.

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Dr. Arvind M. Nawale is working as Head of the Department of English in Shivaji Mahavidyalaya, Udgir, Dist: Latur (Maharashtra).

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Dr.Nawale & Mothe: First of all Dr.Dilip, We would like to thank you for your consent for this interview

Dr.Barad: It's all my pleasure! Thank you for giving me this opportunity to express my views on ELT.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: Why did you decide to become an English language teacher?

Dr.Barad: Frankly speaking, it is difficult to say whether it was a matter of 'free will' or 'lack of choice'. It is something that 'happened' rather than myself 'deciding' to be something. But, I enjoy being a teacher, and it is bliss to teach English language and literature. I do not think any other profession would have given the satisfaction that this profession has offered.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: What do you think about the evolution of ELT teaching? Do teachers have better tools today?What is role of ICTs in English language teaching and learning?

Dr.Barad: ELT has surely evolved to new heights. Some would say to new 'lows'. These 'highs or lows' are but a matter of perspectives. Today, ELT being considered better as bi- or multi-lingual is one of the paradigm shifts from the mono-lingual way of approached its methodologies.

Yes, teachers are equipped with far better opportunities and tools. Internet surely has made a big difference. One of the advantages it has offered is providing wider scope to understand the way people in various parts of the world speak ‘the language’. It has helped in crashing the illusion that the language is something like ‘virgin’ and should not be corrupted by deviant ways of speaking. This makes big difference in giving confidence to the people of the world and teachers to think of adaptive ways of teaching.

ICT has major role to play in ELT. Today, we breath technology and the classroom without technology is unimaginable. ICT helps in bridging the gap between the native speakers and foreign learner. Language is best learnt by listening and if we listen the native speaker, it helps in better acquisition. Another advantage is the multimedia avatar of ELT. Reading books to learn language is like reading to learn to swim. Language is a gamut of various things i.e. apart from L-S-R-W-, it involves cognitive and constructive aspects of knowledge. Thus, any method or approach that deals with L-S-R-W is isolation may never help in constructivism of knowledge. ICT has provide us with ample opportunity with its audio, visual, interactive and collaborative characteristics. Thus, learners, today, is exposed to better learning environment because of ICT.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: What most interests you about ELT at the moment?

Dr.Barad: It is ICT and its unfathomable opportunities in the field of ELT. Blogs & Wikis to teach how to enhance R-W skills; free audio editor and recording software to promote self-learning of L-S skills and Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to learn to adopt constructivism in acquiring knowledge. Where is the history of human civilization were teachers & students provided a learning exposition!

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: Recently Ministry of HRD (Govt. of India) has awarded special financial assistance to you for e-Content development. What are your explorations on e-Content development in ELT?

Dr.Barad: Yes, MHRD has offered me a pilot project for eContent development but it is on Literary Theory and Criticism. But, I can see ample opportunities in developing eContent for ELT also. With the help of web 2.0 tools a teacher can easily develop its eContent. Web tools like audacity (audio recorder & editor) can help teacher in developing personalized and customized speaking and listening content. Such content can be culture specific, accent neutralised and the most relevant to the learner of the teacher. The teacher can use blogs, wikis, eGroups, Google Educator etc to work on students writing and reading skills also.

Today, teacher need not rely on ready-to-use content developed by someone living in London or New York or Mumbai or Delhi. The learning can use contents developed by experts from big towns. The teachers can develop content which is the best suitable to his/her classroom.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: You have worked also on a UGC research project on ‘Technology and Teaching English’. What are your findings regarding role of ICTs in different adaptive methods and methodologies in it?

Dr.Barad: Yes, the UGC project o ICT for Teaching and Learning led me into an interesting domain i.e. Blended Learning. The Blended Learning seems to rule our pedagogical concerns in days to come. It is too early to say that technology will replace the teacher. Today, it seems to be an absurd idea. Personally, I believe technology has prospective to replace some teachers and there are teachers who are better replaced. But in today’s scenario, what seems to be more

adaptive to our learning environment is Blended Learning. The traditional ‘Face to Face’ teaching / learning is merged with technology enabled teaching / learning. And it works quite well. That’s what my research proves. The feedback from the students says that they loved to learn with more intervention of technology and lesser one by teachers. It was surprising to note that their participation in seminar & conferences improved and most of them fared well in their Post Graduate exam as compared to their Under Graduate results. What was more important was to see students relishing their learning. We used to have Saturdays and Sundays as ‘learning days’ where in students used to work on their blogs, Google Sites, Presentation and YouTube videos.

I think this sort of adaptive methods i.e. Blended Learning is going to be the ‘mantra’ of this decade in ELT.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: You have recently completed online course (Web Skills for Teachers) from University of Oregon, USA. Can you tell us how Web skills can be helpful in ELT?

Dr.Barad: Yes, the WST online course from University of Oregon, USA was very helpful in understanding use of ICT in ELT. Unless the teacher do not understands the appropriate use of web tools, s/he cannot make most out of it for ELT. The teacher need not only be techno savvy but techno-fluent to be effective teacher in 21st Century. Having working knowledge of web skills, make today’s teachers effective facilitators in the learning process of ELT. The capacities and capabilities of Google Education tools, Wikis, Blogs, Social Media (i.e. Facebook, G Plus, Tweeter, LinkedIn etc) are immense. The course like this helps teachers in learning web skills so that s/he can be effective in 21st century classroom in catering the needs of 21st century learners.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: Please share some tips on becoming a ‘better’ English language teacher.

Dr.Barad: First, the teacher is the role model. Students cannot be better than the teacher. So, he has to refine his LSRW skills to the best possible level.

Secondly, the teacher who brings ‘live’ conversations and living examples is ‘better’ than the one who is bookish or the one who limits his classroom to the closed walls of language labs. Be live and bring in live conversations of day to day use!

Thirdly, read the outcomes of latest researches in ELT. This will help in adapting new methods and approaches.

Lastly and most importantly, the teachers should be engaged in ‘action research’. One should get involved in ‘reflective learning’ along with teaching. Simple way to put it is – teacher should be involved in progressive problem solving by observing teaching / learning process, getting feedback from the learners and working out solution for learners.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: According to your website, your ELT interest seems to be tilted towards CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning). What does this mean exactly, and how are such approaches relevant to ELT issues in India?

Dr.Barad: The methods and approaches of ELT ought to tilt towards CALL in 21st century. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is succinctly defined in by Michael Levy as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" *CALL: context and conceptualisation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1997). Thus, any approach of

teaching language where in any form of technology is used may be termed as CALL in ELT. One cannot imagine a class within CALL.

So far as country like India is concerned, where in half of India is struggling without basic amenities like power supply, it is difficult to consider CALL in the classroom. But, India is changing very fast and the way Government of India and State Governments are prioritizing infrastructure development, it seems that Indian educational institutes will not be suffering from lack of ICT infrastructure. But what troubles more is the mental attitude of teachers. Infrastructure will change but it is very difficult to change the mindset of teachers in India. And I see that as a big problem in CALL as an approach in ELT. Henceforth, I foresee, need for orientation & training for teachers in CALL and its positive use in ELT.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: A major challenge for English-as-a-second-language speakers is that they cannot effectively relate to conceptions of the target language because of reflective differences. I, for example, think with an Indian mind, while Prashant may think with a American mind, and another may think with an African mind. When we try to translate our concepts into another language then the difficulties emerge. We can think clearly, but the translation is blurred. What's the reason and remedies, according to you?

Dr.Barad: I agree with the question. There are such problems in communication. But such problems are in Mother Language also, though more pertinently in Other Language. Ferdinand de Saussure has rightly observed that the word is a sign which signifies the concept. But there is a lacuna which is filled in by the listener. This process of filling the meaning in the lacuna depends on the 'context'. The meaning in communication is always context specific. It is context which gives meaning to the conversation. The problem in communication is by and large, the problem in understanding context. If the communicator is careful in making the context more clear, s/he can easily avoid being miscommunicated.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard Graduate School of Education is known for his theory on different kinds of intelligence, such as social intelligence, spatial intelligence and so on. Do you have any thoughts on how this idea applies to English language teaching?

Dr.Barad: I do agree with Gardner's *Frames of Mind*. All seven intelligence viz. Linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, spatial, interpersonal and intrapersonal, are useful in language learning also. The teacher who understands this can effectively reach to all types of learners and the learning becomes fun. The case studies should be devised based on these intelligences to enhance learning of English as Second and Foreign language. If his ideas are effectively put into practice, we can acquire foreign language with equal efficiency of Mother language.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: What is role of humour in English Language Teaching and Learning? Have you found humour to be an important aspect of your work as a teacher?

Dr.Barad: The successful teacher is a humorist. Without humour one can neither live nor teach. The classroom in the world in miniature and without humour the classroom is burning hell.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: You may be aware that the Japanese government set up a panel to consider whether or not to fully integrate English in the elementary school curriculum. If you were on that panel, what would your advice be?

Dr.Barad: Keeping in mind the present status of English language and world language or window to the world, I would strongly recommend its integration at Elementary level.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: We have observed that most of ELT teachers are still teaching it in old-fashioned way either because they think it's the best thing to do or because they feel that it's necessary for passing exams, or because it's the only way they can teach! What steps we can take regarding this?

Dr.Barad: Our teachers should not be our ideals! The problem is because today's teachers consider their teachers as their ideals and try to imitate them in their classroom. They did excellent job in their days. The days have changed and young teachers need to adapt themselves to new learning environment. Teachers ought to be more innovative and try out new things with the help of handy technology like cellular phone, mobile devices, texting, emails, internet, multimedia resources etc.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: Learning language is a long term business and particularly once you get beyond the very initial stages of learning a language it becomes very kind of frustrating and demotivating for learners as they seem to be putting in a huge amount of efforts and they don't seem to be getting any payback for that efforts. So we're favouring certificate courses. We've got a certificate in TESOL and we have a certificate in teaching English to young learners and many online courses which is one of the major trends that has happened in these years. What do you think on it?

Dr.Barad: I do not believe that 'certificates' is the proof that the learner has learnt the language. It is good to motivate the learner but language is such a thing that cannot be taught. One has to acquire it. The process of acquisition requires minute observation and imitation. The child acquires Mother language by observation and imitation. Language learning never ends. There is always a change of improvement. Perfection in language is illusion. One can excel his/her previous level, but perfection is impossible. If learning is having fun in learning the nuances of language, s/he never get frustrated or de-motivated. It is not finding better job that frustrate not the language. Only power over language cannot give a good job. Language is like an icing over the cake. It beatifies and helps in better job opportunities but one should have some other skills (I.Q., E.Q., S.Q. etc) to get settled well in cut throat market.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: There are some interesting projects just coming up. There is a project in Malaysia called Magical Lab, which is very exciting and We have just become involved in it which are quite excited about it because it is developing e-resources and tools for teachers related to vocabulary. What do you think on it?

Dr.Barad: It is interesting project. I am happy to learn that you are involved in such projects. It is one good example of cross border collaboration. Internet helps in democratization of knowledge and provides opportunity for collaboration. In fact, collaboration is going to be the buzz word in this century. Isolated learning will not have takers in this era. Waiting anxious to see the end product of your project.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: What do you think about present Indian ELT syllabus? Is syllabus of the textbooks that people are using should be changed fairly?

Dr.Barad: Yes, it should. And if I am asked to suggest, I would make only one suggestion-introduce Blended Learning. I have seen teachers use technology in their classroom. I have seen students use it in their learning. But it is rare to see technology incorporated in the curriculum and suggested as text books are suggested. It is rarity to see websites in the list of recommended reading also.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: What kind of personal philosophy of teaching do you try to put into your talks and writings on ELT?

Dr.Barad: Well, I believe that the teacher should ‘understand students’ and their learning environment. The borrowed philosophies or pedagogies should be tried and tested in one’s learning space before diving headlong in the pool of methods and approaches. Each and every learner is difference. Similarly, each classroom is unique. The teacher should keep him/herself awakened to this fact and think about it before adapting approaches and methodologies in ELT.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: What are your current researches topics on which you are working presently?

Dr.Barad: I am busy completing the project in eContent and planning to work on Sociolinguistic Competence and Social Media. In fact, one of research scholar is working on this topic under my guidance.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: You have done a lot of things in this field, Dr.Dilip. I imagine that there are many aspiring English teachers and authors who are reading this interview who would like to know the secret of your success. So what is the secret of your success as an ELT teacher, researcher and educator?

Dr.Barad: I think there is no secret but ‘hard work’, ‘innovative thinking’ and ‘grace of God’. I don’t know if I have succeeded in what I aspire to be / do, but if any sort of difference I have made or making is because of these three things – hard work, innovative thinking and grace of God.

Dr.Nawale & Mothe: Thanks very much sir for sharing your thoughts with us.

Dr.Barad: Thanks.